

March 5, 2016
Public Health Committee

Testimony: Raised Bill No. 355-An Act Concerning Local Health Districts

We would like to thank the Public Health committee for continuing to recognize the important role of local public health. The proposed amendment in Section 1 of Section 19a-2a of the general statutes would require the Commissioner of Health to "audit the records of each local health department and district for purposes of assessing their performance and the compliance of the local directors of health with their duties." The Connecticut Association of Directors of Health (CADH) is the professional organization for Connecticut's local health departments and districts. Local health directors are the statutory agents of the Commissioner of Public Health and are critical providers of essential public health services at the local level in Connecticut. CADH has a strong partnership with the Department of Public Health and the Connecticut Association of Boards of Health (CABOH). Together, we continue to work together to build the capacity of local Boards of Health by providing education and support, to ensure that the Boards retain local governance while ensuring delivery of public health services. Local boards of health understand the needs and priorities of their local communities and therefore play an important role in promoting population health. They set local public health priorities and are the most appropriate body to provide oversight to local health departments.

All of our health directors are committed to meeting their obligations to protect the health of the public, and ensure public safety. Local Health directors have expertise and knowledge on the subject of public health infrastructure, the social determinants of health, and most importantly, primary prevention. Direct public health services are provided through local health departments, **not** the state Department of Public Health. Local public health provides health education and early detection to reduce the impact of chronic diseases such as cancer, heart disease, asthma and diabetes. These diseases are strongly affected by social and behavioral factors that can be modified through local public health efforts. Local public health keeps the community safe from infectious diseases including meningitis, sexually transmitted diseases and TB. Local public health protects the health of our children through immunization outreach efforts, smoking and substance abuse prevention, lead screening and abatement. Local public health ensures the safety of our water, food, schools and daycares through inspection and permitting. While clinical providers are an important part of medical health care, and many public health professionals also have clinical expertise, Public Health focuses on prevention specifically, and consequently, requires a different skill-set and approach to educating, delivering services and communicating with the public. That is why a Public Health education and experience is necessary (and required)

but a medical degree is not a necessary prerequisite for Health Directors in Connecticut.